

## **What is work-related asthma?**

Asthma is a disease of the airways causing intermittent episodes of cough, wheeze, shortness of breath, and chest tightness and pain. Certain environmental agents can trigger an asthma episode, such as: allergies, respiratory infections, weather changes and exposure to irritants (smoke and air pollution, chemicals, cleaning products, etc.). If something at your workplace gives you an asthma attack, it is called work-related asthma.

Some work conditions can trigger or cause asthma such as:

- cold temperatures
- heavy physical work
- dust
- chemicals
- allergens
- smoke

Some people first get allergies to agents in the workplace, which then causes asthma.

# **What is work related asthma?**



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## **What types of work are at high risk?**

You can be exposed to asthma-causing agents in virtually all types of jobs. The more common occur with exposure to industrial chemicals and paints, pharmaceutical and medical profession, manufacturing, entertainment industry, agriculture, construction, forestry, electrical machinery, and janitorial.

## **How do I know if I have work-related asthma?**

- Do you get asthma attacks at work or when you are doing a certain job at work?
- Do the attacks happen more often during the hours you are at work? Do they get better when you are away from work or on vacation?
- Has your asthma gotten worse since you started a new job or moved to a new work area?
- Do you also get allergy symptoms such as runny or itchy nose, itchy or watery eyes, sneezing or itchy skin when you are at work?
- Have you ever been exposed to very high levels of toxic fumes at work after which you have had breathing difficulty?

If any of these things are happening to you, you may have work-related asthma or you may be getting allergic to something in the workplace.

## **How will my doctor find out for sure?**

First, your doctor will make sure that you have asthma by asking specific questions such as: worsening with exercise, at night, and after exposure to certain agents, including agents in the workplace. Then your doctor will ask you questions about the timing of your asthma worsening with exposure to certain work-place areas and may ask you to measure your lung function with a peak flow meter to determine if there

is a pattern of worsening at work. You might have additional breathing and allergy tests. You may be referred to an asthma specialist or a specialist in occupational medicine.



## **Can Work-related asthma be treated?**

Yes, work-related asthma can be treated in much the same way as regular asthma. However, special attention must be given to avoiding asthma trigger in the workplace.



## **Where can I learn more about asthma and work-related asthma?**

A good source of information about asthma is the website of the Asthma Coalition of Texas at <http://www.texasasthma.org/>.

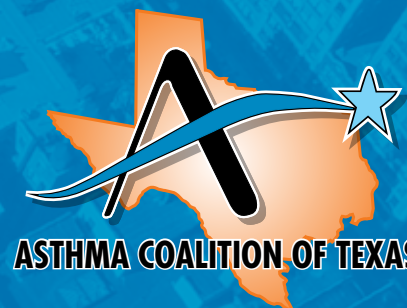
To find out more about work-related asthma, go to the following websites:

<http://www.state.nj.us/health/eoh/survweb/wra/index.shtml>

<http://www.cdc.gov/node.do/id/0900f3ec8000ec09>

[http://www.getastmahelp.org/Occupational\\_asthma\\_main.asp](http://www.getastmahelp.org/Occupational_asthma_main.asp)

<http://www.lungusa.org/site/pp.asp?c=dvLUK9O0E&b=22597>



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